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ABSTRACT

This annotated list of seventeen educational games, developed for teaching about young children and/or parenting skills, recommends the use of simulation games as tools in the teaching of child development to adults. Advantages of simulation games over other educational techniques are discussed. The board game of "Mandala," a child-rearing game, is described in detail. Other games described briefly are: Action-Alysis, After You're Gone, Determining Family and Sexual Roles, Dilemma, Family Game, Family Contract, Generation Gap, Ghetto, Inner City Simulation Laboratory, Juvenile Delinquency Game, Learning Disabilities Game, Parent-Child Game, Successful Student Teaching, Social Security Game, and Total Person. (BF)

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Learning About Children Through Simulation Games

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For years early childhood educators have talked about how children learn best by doing. Piaget stresses the importance of children's operating upon their environments and manipulating and exploring their worlds. The impact of the open education movement has resounded in the recognition that children learn best by being active and taking initiative in their own learning. It is consistently written that teachers of young children must make learning fun for them. Too often, however, educators fail to heed their own words. When the word "game" is heard, it is generally associated with children. But games have proved to be viable tools for adult learning as well.

The fundamental principle of learning by doing is not the exclusive domain of the young. Simulation games employ this philosophy and encourage adults in the field of child development to utilize this philosophy in their own learning. Students of child development who have been involved in their own learning are more likely to use the same active learning techniques with the children they teach. The teaching of child development is conveyed and enhanced through the use of these educational tools.

Participants in a simulation game find themselves in an environment which is governed by rules and is operated similarly to the way the real world works (Easterly, 1977). A chance factor is usually inherent in games of this type. The spin of a wheel, the roll of dice, the chancing of a card determines the destiny of the players. Simulation games add spice and flair to a sometimes otherwise dull classroom lecture. They are viable alternatives to those who teach about young children.

Advantages of Simulation Games

The use of games is increasing in educational settings because game simulations have a number of distinct advantages over other educational techniques. Students are able to anticipate and deal with

situations before they actually face the real-life situation. Players are allowed to experience the immediate consequences of their behavior. Upon reevaluation, they can change their course of action. It is possible to experiment through trial and error with solutions and ideas and the penalties of reality do not exist (Rogers & Kysilka, 1970).

Simulation games require active physical and cognitive participation. They allow participants to experience a sense of controlling the future and to be actively engaged in the formal educational process. In addition, they meet the needs of a wide range of student abilities (Gillespie, 1974) since students participate on their own levels. Another important advantage of simulated activities is the emphasis placed on communicative skills, persuasion, and influence-resisting techniques (Rogers and Kysilka, 1970).

The teaching of child development is often a struggle. Keeping the content interesting and alive for students is an art. One way to make the subject matter more meaningful is to put students into roles in which they must participate physically, cognitively, and affectively. As a result, the teacher's role is changed from that of an overseer or dispensor of facts. The instructor is placed in the role of facilitator, and the student is removed from the traditional passive role. This is as it should be. The learner is placed in a position to make decisions, raise questions, make judgements, try out answers, and to explore alternatives.

There is something for everyone in simulation games because all ability levels can participate. With its emphasis on action and movement, even the nonreader can maneuver through most games. In fact, both underachievers and achievers are successful in simulation games.

Even those students who could not achieve by traditional educational means have demonstrated success during simulation games (Boocock and Schild, 1968).

MANDALA: A Child-Rearing Game

In the area of teaching about child development-family relations, there are a number of excellent simulation exercises and games available. If, however, the goal is to teach parenting skills and principles of child development, then the teacher might use the game of MANDALA (Robinson and Baker, 1977).

MANDALA is a board game in which players rear an imaginary child. The "parent" copes from conception to age 12 with true-life experiences of the child. A dice throw sends players through the various stages of a child's development. Points are awarded along the way for coping correctly with problems. Players do not get sent to jail, but they may be required to take a trip to the "Little Red Schoolhouse," or the learning center. The cards tell players to learn a lesson such as how to assist children during toilet training or how to facilitate the child's cognitive growth.

Sometimes role playing is required. In one instance, the adult becomes the child and tells how it feels to be nonverbally scolded. Throughout the game players are encouraged to voice support or alternatives to various child-rearing techniques. One goal of the game is to link theory with practice. The theories of Erikson, Piaget, Burton, White, Skinner, and Kohlberg are applied as the game unfolds.

The object of the game is to develop the whole child by acquiring 5 points in each of the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical areas

of development and to reach the Mandala symbol in the center of the board.

Because of their complexity, most simulation games of this nature take much time and energy to develop. Many simulation games, however, are available from educational sources. Following is an annotated list of educational games developed for teaching about young children and/or parenting skills.

Simulation Games Concerned With Learning About Young Children And/Or Parenting Skills

Action-Alysis. This game offers practice in student-teacher interaction. The evaluation of teaching methods and theory is involved. The possibilities of situations and attitudes which may arise are meant to simulate as closely as possible those which may arise in the Classroom. ORDER FROM: Randa Inc., Post Office Box 143; Old Bethpage, Long Island, New York.

After You're Gone. This game offers insight into the problems of a mother deciding whether or not to abort a child. ORDER FROM: Visiting Nurse Service; 144 West 125th Street; New York, New York.

Determining Family and Sexual Roles. This game presents activities dealing with alternative families, marriage contracts and pre-marital sex. Game folds out like a map with activities on both sides. ORDER FROM: Greenhaven Press, Inc.; 1611 Polk Street, N.E.; Minneapolis, Minnisota 55413.

Dilemma. This simulation game deals with the problems of teenagers. Drugs, alcohol, sexual concerns, and other dilemmas must be dealt with. The game can be used by adults who work with adolescents or by adolescents themselves. ORDER FROM: Dr. Margaret Feldman, Department of Human Development; Ithaca College; Ithaca, New York 14850.

Family Game. Family Game. This gives insight into the roles within the family, including one's own. ORDER FROM: Psychology Today Games; Del Mar, California 92014.

Family Game. This is a board game for parents and children of the same family to play together, responding to personal questions about their roles in that family. ORDER FROM: Dynamic Design Industries; 1433 North Central Park; Anaheim, California 92802.

Family Contract. This game is designed to revolve around the practice of writing contingency contracts which spell out desired behavior and allow social activity or provide material reward for compliance. This programed board game guides family members through basic steps in the interpersonal Problems, Inc.; Box 389, 62 Yankee Peddler; Path, Madison CT 06443.

Generation Gap. This game simulates the commonest conflicts between parent and adolescent. Purpose is to give some understanding of the structure of power and interdependence in the family and to shape effective strategies for handling the conflict. ORDER FROM: Western Publishing Company, Inc.; 850 Third Avenue; New York, New York 10023.

Ghetto. GHETTO simulates that presistence, and long-range planning are necessary to improve one's lot. ORDER FROM: Western Publishing Company, Inc. Address as above.

Inner City Simulation Laboratory. For education students. This game deals with helping children with handicaps and various educational limitations and with working with parents of problem children. ORDER FROM: Science Research Associates; 259 East Erie Street; Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Juvenile Delinquency Game. This game is for children, parents, teachers, and law officers. It gives insight into values, attitude change, and behavioral change. ORDER FROM: Defense Documentation Center; Cameron Station; Alexandria, Virginia 22314.

Learning Disabilities Game. This game teaches skills for dealing with children with mild to moderate learning problems. ORDER FROM: F. W. Broadbent, Syracuse University; Syracuse, New York 13210

Mandala. MANDALA was designed as a learning tool to be used with individuals or small groups who have one thing in common: The desire to learn about the young child's development and to explore alternatives for fostering optimal growth. The players take the role of parent and rear an imaginary child from conception to age 12. ORDER FROM: MANDALA, Post Office Box 575; Bakersville, North Carolina 28705

Parent-Child Game. This game gives insight into parent-child relationships. Two subsystems are involved: The parent and child and the community of parents and children. Each parents' principle interaction is with the child, but there is also interaction with the other players in the roles of parent in the game. ORDER FROM: John Hopkins University; Department of Social Relations; Charles and 34th Streets; Baltimore, Maryland 21218.

Successful Student Teaching. This simulation game may be played by student teachers in child development or early childhood education. It can be played prior to, or at the beginning of, an actual student teaching experience. Student teachers play the game in order to learn what to expect, as well as what is expected of them during student teaching. Cooperating teachers may play the game in order to develop and/or strengthen some of those supervisory competencies which are necessary when working with student teachers. ORDER FROM: Innovative Education Incorporated: 201 Shagbark Drive; Rochester, Michigan 48063.

Social Security Game. This game was developed by an instructor of Parent Effectiveness Training as a more effective way of sharing ideas and feelings.

Social Security Game continued. Players exercise their communication skills and learn new ones. ORDER FROM: Kimm Company; 12031 Wilshire Boulevard; Los Angeles, California 90025

Total Person. This is an interaction-discussion game for four players or four teams. The object of the game is to make a decision about some issue as a "total person" consisting of emotional feelings, attitudes, and values. ORDER FROM: Pennant Press, 4680 Alvarado Canyon Road; San Diego, California 92120.

See Gibbs (1974) for the following bibliographies on simulation games: Magazines and Journals, Books, Associations, Clubs, and Societies, Institutions offering courses in Simulation Games, An index of 1,500 simulation games.

For a comprehensive index on simulations and games, see The Guide to Simulations/Games for Education and Training from Robert E. Horn; c/o AHR 80 Marrett Road; Lexington, Mass. 02173.

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